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Chairman: Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued)

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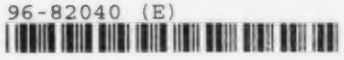

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued) (A/51/41, A/51/90, A/51/306 and Add.1, A/51/385, A/51/424, A/51/456 and A/51/492)

1. Mrs. SMOLCIC (Uruguay) said that her country was taking an active part in the efforts of the international community, and especially of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to address the many problems of today's children throughout the world and in particular to find a swift and lasting solution to the problem of children affected by armed conflicts. In that connection it was impossible to overemphasize the importance of the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), which, owing to the copious information and numerous conclusions presented by its author, had proved to be of broader scope than envisaged. Her delegation endorsed the practical recommendations contained in the report, especially the one concerning the appointment of a special representative on the question. Furthermore, Uruguay attached great importance to the Declaration and Programme of Action of the Stockholm World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and more specifically to the concrete measures proposed therein for promoting cooperation among States, regional organizations and the United Nations with a view inter alia to preventing and eliminating sex tourism.

2. Turning to the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456), she noted that, in October 1996, Uruguay had held its first meeting on the sexual abuse of children of both sexes and of adolescents, at which representatives of the public and private sectors had shown their interest in mobilizing the social actors and devising prevention and intervention strategies to cope with the problem.

3. The presentation of Uruguay's initial report (CRC/C/3/Add.37) at the latest session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child had provided an opportunity for a constructive dialogue which had demonstrated the priority now accorded to children by the Government of Uruguay in its political programme to promote public and private activities carried out with the financial aid of the international community. The financial support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was an important catalyst for the programmes which the Government was establishing and implementing in order to ensure the realization of the rights contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to incorporate its provisions in national law.

4. The Uruguayan delegation realized that securing effective respect for the rights of the child, including the guarantees provided by the Convention, required much time and effort, and it expressed its confidence in the United Nations and its satisfaction at the work being done, especially in the working groups on the drafting of two optional protocols, one on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the other on the participation of children in armed conflicts, where one of the aims was to establish the age of conscription at 18 years. However, it was essential for

Governments to fulfil the obligations which they had undertaken by ratifying the various relevant international legal instruments.

5. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO (Burkina Faso) said that the international community could only draw encouragement from the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the holding of the World Summit for Children, the adoption of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, and the Plan of Action produced at the Summit, as well as from the formal commitment of States to guarantee the protection and development of children with greater force and stringency. Nevertheless, the programmes must be strengthened in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa in order to consolidate the achievements. UNICEF and its various partners should redouble their efforts and rethink their strategies.

6. In Burkina Faso, despite the effort expended on the implementation of the national action plan, the global objectives had not been achieved with regard to vaccination, combating diarrhoea, use of micro-nutrients and literacy. The objectives must therefore be revised in order to make them more realistic, the support strategies for the programmes must be strengthened and the national and international partners mobilized to champion the cause of children. It was also necessary to carry out the recommendations on acceleration of the implementation of the national action plan.

7. Since the protection and development of children also depended on the success of the strategies and programmes for enhancing the status of women and for their empowerment, emphasis must be given to the link between the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the cooperation between the committees established under those two instruments must be enhanced.

8. However, for lack of financial resources many strategies and resolutions remained pious wishes. In many developing countries a very large number of children did not have access to basic social services or even to primary health care and education. The Bamako Initiative had helped to save many human lives but it required further strengthening.

9. The organisations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations, in particular UNICEF, should be equipped with sufficient financial resources to do their work properly. Public development aid must be increased in order to satisfy the social needs of the poor within the general framework of the fight against poverty.

10. The international financial institutions must make greater efforts to devise or support genuine social programmes. In that connection a tribute must be paid to the efforts of UNICEF to negotiate the cancellation of debt in favour of social programmes and to the 20/20 initiative. The Secretary-General's Special Initiative for Africa should take into account its mid-decade results in order to focus the programmes better on the areas where serious gaps existed.

11. The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography were criminal activities which must be forcefully suppressed by the international community by means of concerted action at the local, national, regional and

international levels. Programmes must be launched to increase the awareness of the public and provide it with more information and to create protection networks. It would be useful for an intergovernmental organ to take a new look at the Declaration and programme of Action of the Stockholm World Congress.

12. The elimination of the exploitation of child labour would require the adoption of an integrated and more pragmatic approach to improve the cooperation and coordination between Governments and their various partners.

13. Her delegation endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/492) and encouraged the Committee on the Rights of the Child to give increased attention to the exploitation of child labour in collaboration with the partners mentioned in paragraph 40 of the report.

14. The recommendations in the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), regarding the five principal sub-topics provided a basis for resolving the injustices, violations and cruelties suffered by children, especially in areas of conflict. Those recommendations should be quickly put into a practical manual for use by organizations on the ground, and her delegation therefore welcomed the proposal to distribute an abbreviated version of the report to a broader audience. Although it was incumbent upon the Government to protect children in cases of conflict, the international community was also obligated to take spontaneous and coordinated action when the Government no longer functioned.

15. Her delegation was gravely concerned by the phenomenon of child soldiers and strongly supported the proposal to make 18 the minimum age for recruitment into armed groups or forces. The international community should support a total ban on the production, use, trading and stockpiling of landmines. The use of sanctions and embargoes also merited particular attention, as their effects were generally felt most acutely by children and vulnerable groups.

16. Mr. Kwang Jae LEE (Republic of Korea) said he was encouraged by the unprecedented number of States which had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and by their expression of political will to protect the universal rights of children. By becoming a party to that indispensable Convention, each Government committed itself to enact new laws and revise existing legislation consistent with the rights and obligations it enumerated.

17. However, the overall status of children in many parts of the world continued to be a source of grave concern for the international community. Many of their rights, in particular the right to grow and flourish with dignity in an atmosphere of peace and happiness, were being regularly violated. The intolerable conditions in which children lived, especially in developing countries, required international cooperation and assistance more urgently than ever before.

18. The heinous practice of recruiting children into armed conflicts had to be stopped immediately. At the same time, greater attention had to be paid to the question of child refugees and internally displaced children and to their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. His delegation highly commended

the report presented by the Secretary-General's expert on the question (A/51/306 and Add.1), which contained the elements of a comprehensive agenda for action, and fully supported the appointment of a special representative to study that crucial issue.

19. Every year, more than a million innocent children were commercially and sexually abused. His delegation supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, welcomed the convening in Stockholm of the World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, and strongly supported the Declaration and Agenda for Action issued at that Congress.

20. Concerted efforts among Governments, the various bodies and organs of the United Nations and civil society were essential to assure the protection and promotion of the rights of the child in the coming century. In particular, the role of UNICEF as a leading advocate of children's rights was to be supported and encouraged.

21. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said he welcomed the remarkable report presented by the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1). Bangladesh fully supported the recommendations contained in the report, in particular those concerning a comprehensive international treaty banning anti-personnel landmines, adoption of legal measures to prevent gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, increased commitment for refugee and internally displaced children, and ending the recruitment and participation in combat of child soldiers. Collective efforts at the national, regional and international levels were needed to address those problems and United Nations agencies and other inter-governmental bodies had a critical role to play in that area. UNICEF country programmes should incorporate appropriate measures to alleviate the situation. Bangladesh strongly supported the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to ensure follow-up to the report, and called upon the General Assembly to adopt a separate resolution on the report during its current session.

22. The Stockholm Congress had raised the international community's awareness of the dangers presented by the global problem of commercial sexual exploitation of children. Urgent national and international action was required not only to combat that heinous crime, but also to address its root causes. Bangladesh welcomed the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action, which embodied practical commitments and priorities for action at the national, regional and international levels for preventing the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and for protecting and reintegrating the children who were its victims. Bangladesh also thanked the Special Rapporteur for her detailed report on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) which presented a number of useful recommendations.

23. In pursuance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Plan for Action adopted by the World Summit for Children, Bangladesh had adopted a National Programme of Action and a National Policy for Children, and had established a National Council for Children to oversee the implementation of that policy. Programmes relating to children had been given greater focus on

the protection of the rights of the child, and efforts undertaken in that context had started to produce tangible results.

24. Believing that education ensured effective protection and promotion of human rights, including the rights of children, Bangladesh had also made universal access to basic education a priority objective. Innovative programmes such as "food-for-education" had been adopted to enable children from poor families to attend school and complete at least the primary education cycle. Bangladesh had also invested heavily in the education of girls, providing them with free education and special stipends to increase enrolment, addressing early drop-outs and eliminating the gender gap in education. A separate Decade Action Plan for the Girl Child 1991-2000 had been adopted to address the special needs and the development of girl children and to assure their rights by preventing early marriage, child trafficking, violence and sexual exploitation. Special laws had also been passed to address crimes committed against women and children such as dowry-related violence, rape, kidnapping and trafficking.

25. The problem of child labour was a corollary of poverty in developing countries. Bangladesh had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF with a view to eradicating child labour from the garment industry, which was one of the largest employers of children. The Memorandum provided that children would be sent to school and training centres and receive stipends. Those efforts appeared to have been successful and could serve as a model for other countries in similar conditions. Their full implementation would nevertheless require the continued support of the international community and donor agencies.

26. The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by 187 States was testimony to the resolve of the international community to protect the rights of the child. Nevertheless, international efforts aimed at providing the assistance and additional resources needed to reinforce and sustain national efforts should also be intensified. In order to ensure effective implementation of the Convention, States should submit their reports on time and establish national implementation mechanisms that reflected national situations and aspirations, and also engage in effective networking at the national and global levels with a view to increasing awareness and promoting effective implementation of the Convention.

27. Believing that the discussion of such an important question should have the highest level of participation of United Nations bodies, he expressed his disappointment that no representatives of ILO and the Centre for Human Rights were present at the meeting.

28. Mr. RONQUIST (Sweden), amplifying the statement made by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union, said that the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children had, in several respects, carried out pioneering work; in addition to being the first international meeting held on the subject, its structure had been a novelty in that the majority of the time had been devoted, not to negotiation, but to focusing on means of implementing the Agenda for Action, which had been prepared during the course of six regional consultations held in advance. Convened on the initiative of the non-

governmental organization End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT), the World Congress had assembled Governments and non-governmental organizations on an equal footing and provided the opportunity for forming a global partnership based on cooperation between States and non-governmental organizations (which was essential to achievement of the objective), between international bodies, such as UNICEF, the Centre for Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and between national and international law enforcement authorities. It had not created new mechanisms, as it expected existing mechanisms to be strengthened with a view to achieving the goals identified in its Declaration and Agenda for Action (A/51/385), which called on all States to criminalize the commercial sexual exploitation of children and to adopt extraterritorial laws. It also reminded all participants of the common obligation of States under article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and created an international momentum that should give new impetus to the international fight against the sexual exploitation of children. Its contribution to defending the rights of children should be recognized in the omnibus resolution on the rights of the child to be adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

29. Mr. BALL (New Zealand) said that, in the context of preparing its initial report for submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 1997, his Government had ensured that its existing legislation was in conformity with its obligations as a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

30. He noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child would be unable to do its important work without sufficient resources. He welcomed the report of the Secretary-General's Expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) and hoped that, in accordance with its recommendations, the international community would reclaim children as "zones of peace". He also hoped that all Governments would support the adoption of an international instrument banning the production and use of anti-personnel landmines. In April 1996, his Government had declared a unilateral moratorium on the use of such mines by the New Zealand defence force.

31. Believing that the recruitment of child soldiers should be prevented, his Government would continue to play an active role in the Working Group established by the Commission on Human Rights to develop an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that dealt with children in armed conflict.

32. Referring to another area where the protection of children should be strengthened, he indicated that his Government would also continue to play an active role in the Working Group established by the Commission on Human Rights to consider an optional protocol to the Convention that would deal with the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

33. His Government commended the organizers of the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, in which it had participated, and welcomed its culmination in the adoption of a Declaration and Agenda for Action. As one of the first countries to have enacted laws providing for the prosecution of its own citizens and residents who committed child sex offences in other

countries or facilitated the travel of others to do so, it encouraged other countries to consider enacting similar legislation.

34. His Government acknowledged the valuable role of UNICEF and was looking forward to becoming a member of its Executive Board in early 1997. Its key aim would be to ensure that UNICEF continued to operate as efficiently as possible.

35. It was essential to ensure that the commitments made at the World Summit for Children were fulfilled. With a view to establishing a useful base for its future activities, his Government had prepared a report on the status of children in New Zealand and on initiatives to assist children and their families.

36. Cooperation between Governments, international institutions, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations was essential for the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

37. Mrs. APONTE de ZACKLIN (Venezuela) said that she was extremely concerned at the continuing tragic plight of children throughout the world, and believed that States should make unceasing efforts to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to place children at the centre of their political concerns both nationally and internationally. She had read with interest the various reports on children submitted by the Secretary-General, which were doubly useful, in that they contained both detailed information on the numerous violations of children's rights throughout the world and valuable recommendations addressed to States. The main value of the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) and of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm, resided in their having raised the awareness of the international community about the alarming proportions of the phenomenon of child abuse, which now occurred in all regions of the world. She paid tribute to the remarkable analytical work accomplished by the expert designated by the Secretary-General in her objective and poignant study of the impact of armed conflict on children, which recommended to the international community a far-reaching programme of action touching on all aspects of the question.

38. Her country had always been an ardent defender of children's rights, as shown by the many legislative and constitutional provisions relating to the protection of children that had been adopted in implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it had ratified in 1989. Children occupied a central place in national development programmes, and measures had been taken for the achievement by the year 2000 of the goals set at the World Summit for Children, particularly in the areas of prevention, strengthening existing mechanisms, raising public awareness and education, particularly of girls and women. While the United Nations was doing remarkable work on behalf of children, there was no substitute for the will of States to mobilize at all levels in order to eradicate the problems affecting children.

39. Ms. CALCETAS-SANTOS (Special Rapport of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) said that she

had sought in the first part of her report (A/51/456) to give a brief overview of the causes and characteristics of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the profiles of the victims and the abusers and the impact of sexual exploitation on children, all of which were key elements in any attempt to form policies and plans of action. Moreover, as child abusers always sought to minimize the effects of sexual abuse on their victims, she had also endeavoured to show that sexual exploitation had a devastating impact on the physical, mental and psychological health of children.

40. The whole world was now aware that child abuse was happening throughout the world and was often systematic. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, had greatly contributed to that awareness, as had the tragic deaths in Belgium the previous summer of young teenagers who had been sexually abused, which had shattered the myth that only children in developing countries fell prey to commercial sexual exploitation. The States participating in the World Congress had adopted a Declaration and Agenda for Action in which they had pledged to take positive action to eradicate such exploitation. At long last, therefore, the political will that had been lacking up to then seemed to have emerged. Nevertheless, even those countries which were the most strongly determined to combat the sexual exploitation of children and in the best position to do so might be daunted by the magnitude of the problems or might fall into the trap of believing in a non-existent magic formula. For that reason, chapter V of the report presented recommendations to governments on the steps that might be followed to address the problems more systematically at the national level, which could be changed, modified or improved upon as the situation warranted. Such steps consisted of analysing the causes of the concern and the problems which it raised in the context of the country concerned. They also consisted of drawing up an inventory of current and potential resources, namely, the statutory framework, available funds and possible partners.

41. With regard to the statutory framework, all programmes and strategies must take into account the legal framework of the country concerned. It was therefore essential that there should be a review of all existing laws having an impact on the welfare of children in general and exploited and abused children in particular. That would also lead to a determination of gaps and inadequacies, which could, in turn, be the basis for recommendations for legislative action. With regard to substantive laws, the following were some of the questions that must be answered: What were the elements of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography? Who was subject to criminal culpability for each of those offences? With regard to procedural rules, the following questions would be helpful: Was there confidentiality especially of the identity of the child in all stages? Were there rules to preclude undue influence on the child (A/51/456, paras. 46 and 47)? The reporting mechanisms for abuse should likewise be examined, since easy access to complaint mechanisms was vital in order to encourage recourse to the justice system and ensure the success of child protection measures.

42. With regard to the determination of available funds, it was imperative to review the funds available before any measures were implemented. Moreover, if States were to upgrade children's concerns in the order of priorities, they would have to allocate a larger share of their budgets to that effort. Lastly,

other sources of funding should be tapped to supplement the resources currently available.

43. The identification of possible partners was essential, as governments could never tackle the problems alone. In that connection, particular attention should be paid to non-governmental organizations for the protection of children's rights and more cooperation should be sought between governments agencies and non-governmental organizations, so that the activities of each could be harnessed with optimum benefit.

44. Lastly, as had been evident at all the conferences which she had attended, the justice system had a crucial role to play in the fight against child abuse; for that reason, a special focus on the justice system was contained in chapter VI of the report.

45. In conclusion, she wished to point out that while the problem of the commercial sexual exploitation of children was of crucial importance, there was another problem with which it was inextricably linked and which also required urgent attention, namely, the non-commercial sexual exploitation of children, particularly incest. She was confident that the international community would take steps to alleviate those problems in the near future.

46. Mr. ROBINSON (United States of America) said that, year in and year out, United Nations agencies, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, bilateral donors and host governments, had provided emergency relief, health care and clean water and contributed to economic and social development in many countries. They also sought to protect children against violence by promoting policies consistent with the best interests of the child, good governance and national reconciliation. As evidenced by its financial support, his country strongly endorsed those activities, which were the most effective way for the United Nations to make a difference in the lives of the world's children.

47. The success of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children could be attributed not only to the nature of the issues involved, but also to the effective approach adopted by its organizers, which could be emulated in the planning of other gatherings. The adoption of the Declaration and Agenda for Action had been facilitated by pre-conference consultations. The exchanges of views among non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and governments had also been particularly fruitful.

48. The United States endorsed the overall direction of the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), which highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of children by describing the tragic plight of refugee and internally displaced children, children conscripted by armies or militias, or child victims of sexual exploitation. His delegation hoped that the recommendations in the report would result in action. It doubted the usefulness, however, of appointing a separate special representative, as the report recommended, to monitor children caught up in armed conflicts.

49. The United States shared the concerns expressed in the report on the potential effects of economic sanctions on vulnerable populations, especially

children. It had regularly supported humanitarian exceptions in sanctions regimes for that reason. However, the United States disagreed with the report's implicit assumption that it was the sanctions themselves that harmed children in sanctioned countries; rather, it was their Governments' choices of social priorities and their callous decision to disregard the needs of children and use their sufferings as political leverage.

50. It was obvious that structural adjustment programmes alone would not provide a long-term solution to poverty and inequality. However, sound public programmes of investment in human capital and basic services would generate more resources and make better use of them for the benefit of all, including children.

51. For the past three years, the United States Department of Labor had been doing research on child labour worldwide. Its first two reports had sensitized the United States public to the horrific conditions under which children worked in different countries. The third study had pointed to some advances, particularly in the garment industry.

52. Efforts must be reinforced to combat the exploitation of children by providing resources for education and law enforcement and doing more to make the exploitative employment of children profitable. The members of the international community must work together, putting ideology, politics and rhetoric aside, so that children could live in peace in a more humane and prosperous world.

53. Mr. LEWIS (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund) apologized for the absence of the Executive Director, who had been obliged to go to the Great Lakes region to organize assistance. UNICEF had already spoken on the situation of children involved in armed conflict, on street children, the sexual exploitation of children, child labour and the education and emancipation of girls, and he would limit his remarks to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, underscoring the remarkable impact its implementation had had.

54. Its ratification by 187 States had led government authorities to take concrete steps. The ethical and social principles set out in the Convention and the legal framework it provided were being scrutinized throughout the world. On every continent, its implementation had spurred debates on the problems of indigenous children and young people, the education of girls, the media, the progress made and the procedures for preparing State party reports. The Convention would also be at the centre of the debates on child labour that would be held in 1997, just as it had been central to the study done by the expert of the Secretary-General in document A/51/306 and Add.1.

55. In the course of all the discussions, children had had their say. By testifying themselves against sexual exploitation, prostitution, violence, genital mutilation, the lack of access to education, slavery, gender inequality, armed conflict, and, above all, poverty, they had touched Governments. As a result, nations the world over were modifying their policies, their constitutions, their legislation and the way in which they administered juvenile justice, to reflect the provisions of the Convention. The Governments of the

industrialized and the developing countries were taking up questions they had never before considered.

56. If all that had been possible, it was thanks to the action of institutions like UNICEF, but especially to the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. That group of 10 experts based in Geneva monitored the implementation of the Convention not only on the basis of reports submitted to it but also on the basis of on-site visits and the holding of thematic debates which had been the inspiration of many initiatives, like the study on the impact of armed conflict on children, the Stockholm World Congress, exchanges of views on child labour, and activities promoting the rights of girls. By developing guidelines for the preparation of State party reports and the comments on the reports it received, the Committee was establishing a jurisprudence in the field of the rights of the child. It played a central role in the work being done by United Nations bodies, Governments, non-governmental organizations and all those who were struggling to promote the rights of the child.

57. By putting the Convention into effect, Governments were not simply implementing a binding legal instrument but were changing the living conditions of children. That was why the decisions taken by the members of the Third Committee were crucial.

58. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that, as Pope John Paul II had stated in his message on the occasion of the 1996 World Day of Peace, the Catholic Church had always been one of the primary providers of care for children.

59. The report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) not only brought out the sufferings that were imposed on children, but the impact that such suffering could have on the nature of the societies in which the children were to live. It was not enough for children to survive. Children must be allowed to thrive if the world of the future was to be a better one. The report made the point that by destroying the structure of the family, armed conflicts undermined the very basis of human society, depriving children of love, strength and the values of those around them and abandoning them to themselves. The report described particularly well the situation of children recruited by armies or militias. It showed the need to maintain family unity for refugees and internally displaced children, the need for an international ban on landmines, the impact of sanctions, and the need to provide children with food and education in order to restore normalcy to their lives. Children were forced not only to take on adult responsibilities but were abducted from their world of imagination and hope and were forced into actual combat, prostitution and hate.

60. The lessons of the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) were certainly applicable to innumerable other tragedies facing children, whether as victims of commercial or sexual exploitation, or suffering from lethal illnesses such HIV/AIDS. The ethical nature of any solutions offered to such problems should be examined, as the world was being sucked into a desolate moral vacuum. In that regard, the Holy See reaffirmed

its opposition to abortion and its practice as a dimension of reproductive health services.

61. The Holy See believed that support should be given to families everywhere, in order to increase the care of all children. In particular, the needs of families living in destitution, displaced by war and suffering disease, should be identified in order to promote the rights of children.

62. Private citizens should make a contribution to peace, within their own homes and in the outside world; and Governments should use every diplomatic means to prevent conflict and seek reconciliation

63. Mr. LOREL (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) referred to the study of the expert appointed by the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1). He was dismayed that an ever-increasing number of children, often under 15 years of age - by nature impressionable and unaware of the consequences of their acts - were recruited or volunteered, often at the cost of their lives, to take part in combats in which they should never have participated, by virtue of international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. ICRC strongly supported the adoption of preventive and curative measures to tackle the problem. In order to promote raising the age of conscription to 18, it had requested the preparation and implementation of a plan of action aimed at promoting the principle of non-participation and non-recruitment of children under 18 in armed conflicts and at taking specific measures to protect and assist children who were victims of armed conflicts. In January 1996, during the meeting of the working group responsible for drafting an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child with regard to the participation of children in armed conflicts, ICRC had deemed it essential that the protocol should be respected by all parties to a conflict, even if the conflict was non-international, because it was in that type of situation that children ran the greatest risks. It was often forgotten that the international humanitarian law applicable in such cases bound all parties concerned without giving them juridical status. Moreover, ICRC believed that the draft optional protocol should forbid all forms of direct or indirect participation of children in conflicts. A prohibition of that type already appeared in the provisions of Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions. Any exception to that rule would only weaken the Additional Protocol. Furthermore, experience in the field had proved that it was almost impossible to establish a distinction between the two forms of participation. Based on its experience, ICRC knew that only preventive measures, especially in the fields of health and education, could improve the protection of children involved in an armed conflict and guarantee their non-participation in hostilities. However, emergency assistance could not have a lasting preventive effect, and long-term solutions therefore needed to be developed. That was mainly the responsibility of States, but humanitarian organizations could make a contribution. In the light of the meagre resources available and the scope of the needs, it was indispensable to mobilize the whole international community.

64. Mrs. ENKHTSETSEG (Mongolia) said that, although the United Nations had done a great deal for children since its creation, a large number of children throughout the world still faced threats to their survival and development. In order to resolve the problem, it was indispensable to proceed methodically and

systematically analyse each and every threat to a child's survival. The expert appointed by the Secretary-General should be congratulated for the extensive appraisal of the impact of armed conflict on children in her report (A/51/306 and Add.1) and for having drawn up a very comprehensive agenda for action to improve the protection of such children. She supported the recommendations, especially those aimed at prohibiting the participation of children below the age of 18 in armed conflicts and at establishing a special representative of the Secretary-General with the mandate to study the impact of armed conflicts on children and to coordinate follow-up to the report.

65. The globalization of the sale of children and child prostitution was another issue which should be dealt with urgently. Her delegation believed that Member States should attentively study the recommendations set out in the Agenda for Action adopted by the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (A/51/385) and in the report of the Special Rapporteur on that issue (A/51/456), with a view to incorporating them into national agendas tailored to children. It also believed that those recommendations should be taken into account in the draft omnibus resolution on the rights of the child that the General Assembly would adopt during the current session.

66. It was heartening that almost all States had become parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the main international pillar for the protection and promotion of children's rights, but that was not sufficient; it should be universally applied. Moreover, the amendment aimed at increasing the membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to 18, adopted on 12 December 1995 by the Conference of States Parties to the Convention and approved by the General Assembly in resolution 50/155, should be accepted by the greatest possible number of States Parties.

67. Mongolia was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention. When the Committee on the Rights of the Child had examined Mongolia's initial report on the application of the Convention in January 1996, it had noted with satisfaction that the Government of Mongolia gave a high priority to issues regarding children and had allocated 20 per cent of its national budget to education. However, it also noted that, as a result of political and economic difficulties, poverty and unemployment were increasing and the situation of children had deteriorated. It had therefore recommended that the Government should strengthen coordination between the different governmental mechanisms involved in human rights and children's rights and ensure closer cooperation with non-governmental organizations. It had also suggested that the Government should establish a multidisciplinary monitoring system to assess the progress achieved and the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the rights recognized by the Convention and, in particular, to monitor regularly the effects of economic changes on children. She indicated that the Government had taken note of those recommendations and intended to follow up on them, in close cooperation with the Centre for Human Rights, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, UNICEF, ILO, UNHCR and other agencies of the United Nations system. It also wished to mention that, following the national programme of action for the development of children in the 1990s, prepared as a follow-up to the World Summit for Children, in May 1996 the Mongolian Government had enacted new laws aimed at protecting the rights of the child.

68. Mr. MISHRA (Nepal) said that his delegation strongly supported the measures taken by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; it urged all States which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention and those States which had reservations on some provisions to withdraw those reservations. It believed that the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be expanded to 18 members to put it at par with the committees responsible for the implementation of other international conventions.

69. He welcomed the report on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) and felt that all the recommendations made in it should be carefully considered and implemented. The practice of using children as soldiers must also be stopped, as well as the production, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel landmines, which killed and maimed a large number of children. Efforts must likewise be made to protect children from exposure to deadly diseases like AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

70. His delegation fully supported the work of the open-ended working group to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict. It felt that the recommendations made in document A/51/456 must be carefully considered and implemented and it was grateful to the Government of Sweden for convening the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996; the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted at the Congress were a significant reference document.

71. Nepal had been one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1992 it had enacted laws on children and labour which incorporated fundamental principles of the Convention. His Government attached great importance to the education of children, particularly girls, and to child and maternal health care. It was striving to eliminate discriminatory practices against girls and women that were traditional in Nepalese society through education, literacy programmes and the dissemination of information. It was in the process of taking legislative and other measures to promote and protect the rights of the child.

72. Mr. NAJEM (Lebanon) said that after signing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children at the World Summit for Children, his Government, through the supreme council on children, had developed a global plan of action for the survival, protection and development of children in all areas. In respect of health, the plan of action provided, in accordance with article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that no child could be denied the right of access to medical services. In accordance with articles 28 and 29 of the Convention, the plan of action aimed to make primary education available and free to all and make higher education accessible to all. With regard to the protection of children, psychosociological education programmes were to be organized, an "education for peace" module was to be introduced in school programmes, radio and television programmes were to be monitored to eliminate all references to violence, and children were to be protected against the dangers of drug use and drug trafficking and against sexual violence and exploitation through the application of existing laws and the strengthening of criminal penalties. Furthermore, the term "illegitimate

child" would be removed from civil registry documents, with retroactive effect. The supreme council on children had undertaken to verify the conformity of Lebanese laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to amend any provisions which were not in conformity with the Convention and propose new bills to the National Assembly.

73. His delegation wished to draw the Committee's attention to the seriousness of Israeli practices against Lebanese children in the occupied areas, particularly daily bombardments, exile and the interruption of schooling, not to mention the double massacre in April 1996 when four children had been killed in an ambulance and many others had been killed in the bombing of Qana. Lebanon, which had only just emerged from war, had made the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child priorities that it would strive to implement progressively.

74. Mr. KHRYSKOV (Russian Federation) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Russian Federation had ratified in 1990, ranked second after the Charter of the United Nations in terms of the number of ratifications. The Committee on the Rights of the Child must continue to play an important role and its conclusions must have the authority of the entire United Nations; its recommendations, based on the study of country reports, must serve as a basis for international cooperation in the defense and protection of children. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, adopted at the World Summit for Children, had given further impetus to that cooperation. The World Conference on Human Rights had underscored the commitment of the international community to the principle "Children first" and stressed the importance of active efforts at the national and international levels. The Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, various United Nations bodies and civil society all played a role in the protection and defence of the rights of the child.

75. The Russian Federation, for its part, had drawn up a national plan for children which had been approved by a decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 14 September 1995. The plan aimed, in particular, to align domestic legislation with the provisions of the Convention, define priorities in areas such as strengthening the legal protection of the child, support for the family, risk-free maternity and the protection of child health, improvement of nutrition, education and development of the child and assistance to children in especially difficult circumstances. It also provided for special measures for the reincorporation in society of child victims of armed conflicts, violence and prostitution, and child refugees. Those measures supplemented other programmes launched by the President.

76. It was important for the protection of the rights of children to better publicize the provisions and principles contained in the Convention; the United Nations should also assist States Parties in implementing that instrument, and rapporteurs, special representatives and working groups of the Commission on Human Rights and its bodies must cooperate with each other.

77. The Russian Federation welcomed the recommendations made by the Commission on Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and believed that

their implementation would facilitate a comprehensive approach to those problems both within the United Nations and at other levels.

78. Ms. AHOUNOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the declaration adopted at the World Summit for Children in 1990 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, unanimously adopted by the General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by almost all Member States, indicated that questions relating to children were of universal importance. That importance was very apparent to African countries, which made major sacrifices to improve the living conditions of their children. However, while they had succeeded in making progress (the vaccination rate had more than doubled in more than 25 countries and the objective of vaccinating 75 per cent of infants had been attained), it was still the case that more than a third of the 40,000 children who died every day in the world were African, a figure explained by wars, the lack of health care and the deterioration in economic conditions brought about by the brutal fall in commodity prices and structural adjustment measures.

79. Aware that there could be no progress without human development, Côte d'Ivoire accorded priority in its development strategy to all matters affecting children. Thus it devoted 47 per cent of its budget to education, it had made school attendance compulsory to the age of 14, and it had more than 2 million children in its schools. Further, it had established a family planning and education policy which allowed it, through mother and child public health services, to keep the population informed regarding every kind of health and nutritional problem, and it applied strict primary and community health care policies in villages and rural centres.

80. In Côte d'Ivoire, as in almost all African countries, the lack of financial resources prevented Governments from promoting and defending the rights of children as much as was needed. The economic crisis and the constraints imposed by multilateral financial institutions drained social affairs, health and education budgets. Her delegation thus appealed once more to the international community to assist the most disadvantaged countries to improve the situation of children and to attain the objectives established at the World Summit for Children in 1990.

81. Lastly, her delegation welcomed the report of the expert appointed by the Secretary-General on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456), and agreed with her that it was absolutely essential to avert armed conflict to prevent millions of children from becoming further victims of the worst atrocities. Education reflecting tolerance, peace, social justice and respect for human rights would be a good means of bringing that about.

82. Mr. HAMDOON (Iraq) said that, since the Second World War, the international community had adopted various instruments, such as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, with a view to ensuring that children did not suffer further tragic situations and to assuring their well-being. That was also the objective of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, had called on all States to ratify. For its part, Iraq had enacted legislation for the protection of children, in particular relating to minors, social protection, compulsory

education and the protection of adolescents. His Government had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994, and had used that instrument as a basis for the formulation of an action plan intended to prepare children for effective participation in community life. His delegation had participated in the negotiations in the Working Group on the preparation of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the participation of children in armed conflicts. It was unfortunate that more than 50 years after a solemn commitment by the international community there were children in the world who lived on the streets, exposed to drugs and sexual exploitation, and who were the victims of armed conflict and famine.

83. The use of economic sanctions, particularly against developing countries, had increased over the current decade. Thus, for six years Iraq had been suffering under iniquitous international sanctions of unprecedented severity. The Executive Director of UNICEF, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme had recently stated that some 4,500 Iraqi children under five years of age were dying each month. They had not spoken of the many children over five years of age or of the adults dying each day as a result of the deteriorating situation in Iraq, largely owing to famine and protein deficiencies. The Secretary-General, in his 1996 report on the work of the Organization, had stated that Iraqi children were the first victims of malnutrition, but the harmful impact of sanctions on children was more widespread, ranging from an increase in the incidence of children's diseases and psychological difficulties to behaviourial problems resulting from difficult living conditions. While many international instruments prohibited the use of hunger and disease as means of political pressure, the question arose of whether all countries were equal or whether different criteria could apply according to political objectives, denying Iraqi children the right to live as granted to other children in the world. As many United Nations agencies had stated, the impact of the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq was not limited to the frightening number of deaths which it had caused among children, women and the elderly, since in fact an entire generation of Iraqis had been sacrificed as a result of the difficulties they had encountered in terms of education and health and other social spheres.

84. The way in which sanctions had been imposed cast doubt on the credibility of the Organization as well as on the morality of the international instruments it had adopted. Further, the honour of the Organization was impugned because the States which dominated the Security Council mocked it by using it as a tool for their own political designs, which had no relationship to the purposes of the Organization, namely the maintenance of international peace and security and international cooperation. In the report on the impact of armed conflict on children, the international community was called upon to cease to impose sanctions such as those affecting Iraq, since sanctions should be viewed from the standpoint of the universal rights of the individual, in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The systematic efforts to annihilate 20 million Iraqis were contrary to all international instruments, which must lead the international community to consider economic sanctions as an internationally prohibited weapon of mass destruction, since the application of sanctions against Iraq had caused significantly more victims than the atomic

bomb at Hiroshima, which was ironic in the extreme given the degree of interest currently evinced in human rights.

85. Mrs. WAHBI (Sudan) said that children were the main victims of poverty in developing countries. In its report on the situation of children in the world, UNICEF emphasized that the international community must intensify its efforts to improve the fate of children, who represented the future.

86. The fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been almost universally ratified clearly indicated that States were now aware of the importance of children. That awareness must, however, be translated into facts. Although most States had already taken some specific measures, international cooperation was essential if developing countries were to be helped to implement the Convention.

87. The Sudan had been one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention, since Islam required that those rights should be respected. Her Government had established a schedule for the implementation of the Convention and had set targets for children's education and health, amongst other things. It had also signed peace agreements with some of the warring parties in the south of the country to restore stability to the Sudan and eliminate the causes of population displacements, of which children were the main victims. A symposium had been organized in Khartoum in June 1996, in collaboration with UNICEF, to adopt measures to help Sudanese children.

88. Her Government was especially concerned by the situation of children in the south of the country. It condemned the use of children as human shields by rebel forces and urged the international community to denounce such practices, which were against international law and humanitarian principles. She welcomed the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) drafted by the expert appointed by the Secretary-General, and emphasized the need to produce, as soon as possible, the definitive version of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the involvement of children in armed conflicts. It was also necessary to address the issue of abandoned children, by registering them and ensuring that they were reunited with their families or taken into care by their local communities.

89. Her delegation condemned the sale and sexual exploitation of children and supported the decisions of the Stockholm Congress. The international community should assist the developing countries in their fight against poverty and in their efforts to protect children so that they could enjoy a normal childhood. It was also necessary to review the situation of children in countries which were subject to economic sanctions and to promote international cooperation, which was the only way to protect the rights of the child.

90. Ms. GORDON (Jamaica) welcomed the two detailed, high-calibre reports submitted on problems concerning children (A/51/306 and Add.1 and A/51/456).

91. Jamaica was no stranger to violence, which was partly a legacy of slavery and colonialism; it was a particularly acute problem in the cities and its main victims were children. An increase in the number of violent crimes committed by young people had also been observed. To combat that violence, her Government

had recently introduced a programme, called "Peace and love in schools", to encourage children to find alternatives to violence for the resolution of conflicts, and which owed its success to the fact that the children provided counselling to one another.

92. Faced with the growing exploitation and abuse of children, her delegation welcomed the interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456), particularly chapter V, which provided an analysis of that very complex issue and listed possible solutions available to States.

93. With the expansion of tourism, there was a growing concern in Jamaica about the sexual exploitation of children. Accordingly, her country had taken part in the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and unreservedly supported its call to put an end to that practice.

94. Her Government, in partnership with UNICEF and other United Nations and international agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society, had been working to address the plight of street children, who were particularly vulnerable and susceptible to prostitution and other ills, and the plight of other children in especially difficult circumstances.

95. Jamaica's new country programme, which it had just finalized in partnership with UNICEF, was based on the recognition that poverty lay at the root of most of the problems affecting Jamaican children. The programme therefore focused on deprived groups and under-serviced geographical areas, and had four main components: (i) basic education and early childhood development; (ii) social policy for children and women; (iii) children and youth at risk (that component was designed to provide education to some 40,000 out-of-school children, provide outreach services to 2,500 children, and reintegrate institutionalized children with their families, or place them with foster parents; and (iv) decentralized community development for children. The programme also provided for legal and policy reform as well as the strengthening of institutions providing services for children.

96. Her Government was aware that its efforts could only be successful of the children themselves took part in the programmes developed for their benefit, and that all Jamaicans, including children, needed to be educated in the rights of the child as defined in the Convention and in Jamaican law, which had been amended to bring it into line with the Convention. In May 1996, to celebrate "Child month", Jamaica had staged a children's parliament, where role-playing children and young people addressed their views to parliamentarians and legislators.

97. Mrs. LIMJUCO (Philippines) recalled that the international community had set itself the target of ensuring the well-being of children by the year 2000. The mid-decade progress report on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Children revealed that action to help children had intensified throughout the world and that new partnerships had been created between Governments, non-governmental organizations, donors, the media, civil society and international organizations Nevertheless, millions of deprived children or

children living in especially difficult circumstances still needed assistance; that was particularly true of children who were the victims of armed conflicts, whose situation had been dealt with in detail in the report by the expert appointed by the Secretary-General (A/51/306 and Add.1).

98. As children made up 47.5 per cent of the population of the Philippines, her Government was keen to ensure that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children were observed. Shortly after ratifying the Convention, her Government had launched a national plan of action for children covering the period 1990 to 1992. Also, in 1992, it had adopted the plan of action entitled "The Filipino child: 2000 and beyond". In the same year it had passed R.A.#7610, the Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act. Her Government had also hosted, from 27 to 29 September 1996, the East Asia and Pacific Ministerial Consultation on Goals for Children and Development in the 1990s. Lastly, on 14 September 1995, in response to the growing number of cases of child abuse, Executive Order 275 created a committee for the special protection of children from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, discrimination and other conditions prejudicial to their development. The committee was composed of top officials, heads of various departments and three representatives of non-governmental organizations. It reported directly to the President on measures taken to address those issues and ordered government agencies to respond immediately to problems brought to their attention and to report back to the committee.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.